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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001247

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SUBJECT: ECOWAS EXSEC CHAMBAS DISCUSSES NEXT STEPS ON LIBERIA WITH A/S KANSTEINER

Classified By Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons 1.5 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) Summary. In a July 12 side-bar meeting during President Bush's visit to Nigeria, A/S Kansteiner told ECOWAS Executive Secretary Chambas that the United States was still considering its policy options in Liberia. Chambas asserted United States troops were essential to the success of a stabilization force. He added that ECOWAS leaders had agreed to deploy a 1,150 "vanguard" quickly to Monrovia. Chambas' timetable for establishing a transitional government was for Taylor to relinquish the Presidency by August 5, with Vice President Blah presiding until October, then handing over to a transitional government mandated to hold elections by October 2004. Most likely, the transitional formula would be a power-sharing arrangement with remnants of the GOL, the LURD, MODEL, and major political parties participating. At the meeting, Chambas was accompanied by his Information Officer and two Special Assistants. Kansteiner was joined by Special Assistant Jim Dunlap, NSC Director Bobby Pittman and Abuja's A/DCM. End Summary

The USG: Seriously Vetting The Options

2. (C) During a July 12 morning meeting at the Ambassador's residence, A/S Kansteiner told ECOWAS Executive Secretary Mohammed Ibn Chambas that the USG was still considering the full range of options for Liberia. Kansteiner elaborated that those options ranged from provision of only financial support, to a mixture of financial and logistical assistance, to the possible deployment of American troops on Liberian soil. A/S Kansteiner emphasized that a decision had not been made. One of the reasons President Bush embarked on the trip to Africa was to hear from the continent's leaders on the subject of Liberia and to listen to their views on the possible introduction of U.S. troops there, Kansteiner said. Kansteiner asked Chambas about the ECOWAS plan for troop deployment to Liberia.

3. (C) Chambas responded that President Obasanjo met Ghana's Kufuor and Mali's Toure, who were joined by several West Africa Foreign Ministers, on the margins of the AU Summit in Maputo. The three Presidents agreed to the rapid deployment of 1,050 troops (Nigeria - 750, Ghana - 250, Mali - 150) no later than July 28. This first deployment would subsequently be augmented by a total number of approximately 3,000 ECOWAS troops. Chambas added that President Obasanjo had named a Nigerian Brigadier General to command the force and Mali was being asked to supply the Deputy Commander. Chambas emphasized that the Heads of State had concluded that a quick deployment was essential to avoid giving Taylor a pretext for remaining. However, he feared a small force not backed by U.S. muscle, might not have the necessary coercive influence. Taylor or one of the other groups might test them. However, a U.S. presence, with all of its military and logistical capabilities, would convince Taylor that his era had ended, Chambas maintained.

4. (C) Assuming U.S. troops would deploy, Kansteiner asked how large an American deployment did ECOWAS envision. How many U.S. troops would it take to convince Taylor and the LURD to cease and desist, Kansteiner asked? Chambas answered that one thousand American troops, particularly with a "vessel on the horizon," would have a sufficient sobering effect on Taylor and the LURD. The full contingent would not have to remain throughout the exercise. Within two or three weeks, roughly half could be withdrawn, Chambas posited. Regarding other help the ECOWAS deployment would need, Chambas stated that per diem, airlift,

logistical and equipment assistance would be needed for most troop contributing states. He was unsure whether Nigeria would need lift assistance or could use their own C-130 transport.

Timing is Important

15. (C) A/S Kansteiner mentioned that the ECOWAS sequence calling for troop deployment a week before Taylor's exit was problematic. He underscored that any U.S. deployment was contingent on Taylor's prior departure. We have said publicly that we will not send troops while Taylor remained in Liberia, Kansteiner affirmed. Noting the USG concern, Chambas acknowledged the ECOWAS scenario contemplated troop deployment before Taylor's departure. He briefly raised the possibility of ECOWAS deploying first, followed by an American deployment after Taylor departed. However, he quickly scotched that idea, stating the importance to Taylor and the Liberia people of simultaneity in the ECOWAS and American deployments. Kansteiner mentioned that President Bush would discuss the sequencing of the possible U.S. deployment with President Obasanjo; maybe a way to finesse this dilemma would be to fashion the simultaneous Taylor departure and U.S. troop deployment. For instance, a MEU could anchor off the coast as Taylor relinquished power on his way to the airport. Upon Taylor's departure, U.S. troops would land immediately.

16. (C) Kansteiner raised concern about LURD statements that it would fight American or any other peacekeepers if deployed prior to Taylor's departure. In part Chambas discounted the LURD statement as braggadoccio. However, he also felt this grew out of a concern that Taylor would footdrag once peacekeepers were deployed and attempt to use the peacekeepers as his defensive shield. Chambas stated that it was important to talk to the LURD to allay these fears. It was equally important that the troops deploy in a manner rendering it difficult for Taylor to be desultory. Chambas added that President Obasanjo planned to visit Conakry on July 13 to discuss Liberia with President Conte. (Comment: Reading between the lines, we believe Obasanjo visited Conakry to persuade President Conte to influence the LURD to behave responsibly. End Comment).

What Manner of Government

17. (C) Chambas asserted that ECOWAS leaders were preoccupied with maintaining as much of a constitutional semblance as possible in the hand-over of power. The Heads of States did not want to discard the constitution completely; they did not want to set too liberal a precedent. Consequently, Chambas had identified August 5 as the appropriate date for Taylor to relinquish power. Taylor was inaugurated August 6, 1997; August 5 would be the last day of his constitutionally mandated six-year term. Additionally, the ECOWAS leaders believed Taylor should pass the baton to Vice-President Blah in consonance with constitutional succession provisions. Chambas stated that Taylor was toying with the idea of replacing Blah with House Speaker Sando Johnson or Planning Minister Roland Massaquoi, both long-time loyalists, so that either one could succeed him. LURD would be uneasy whether Blah or either of the other two became temporary Head of State; the LURD would suspect that Taylor was still piloting the Liberian ship, albeit by proxy, Chambas offered. A/S Kansteiner underlined that the period for Blah to hold power should be brief. This would seem to lessen the LURD's and others' misgivings.

18. (C) Chambas reiterated that the transnational government should be established by October. The government's lifespan would be one year; its mandate would be to reestablish basic government services and to establish conditions to hold elections the following October. The date would be in keeping with the Liberia political custom of holding elections that month. Chambas stated the ideal transitional government would be composed exclusively of technocrats with no political ambitions. However, the

reality was that there were few Liberians who fit that neutral description. Moreover, LURD, and MODEL would balk at a government of technocrats because they would be shut out. Instead, the most likely approach would be that whoever succeeds Taylor must make a public commitment to turn over to the transitional government and not contest in the 2004 elections. Then a government of national unity, including LURD, MODEL, GOL remnants and representatives of the major political parties, would be formed. Participants in the transitional government would be prohibited from participating in the 2004 elections.

9. (C) Although factional involvement in the transitional government might be close to a fait accompli, factional participation should be conditioned on performance on disarmament, Chambas and Kansteiner agreed. Factions should not be allowed to assume their portfolios until achieving noticeable progress on disarmament. Additionally, the factions should not be given control of the security, financial matters, or access to state revenue.

Domestic Opposition to Obasanjo

10. (C) Chambas and A/S Kansteiner noted that President Obasanjo faced noticeable domestic opposition in Nigeria to his asylum offer to Taylor. Human right groups and others had castigated the decision. Kansteiner stated that the indictment against Taylor was more than justified; however, for the sake of peace in Liberia, the United States Government and would not criticize Obasanjo for offering a haven to Taylor in the interest of peace in Liberia.

COMMENT

10. (C) The sub-regional call for American troop deployment is loud and it is clear. The expectation is high. However, the decision to send American troops, if it is made, will not be a panacea. We will still have to work out sticky issues such as timing of Taylor departure, help for ECOWAS troop contingents and the establishment of the transitional government. The more assistance we provide, particularly if that assistance comes in the form of troops, the more leverage we will have to influence the resolution of these other issues and the direction the peace process will take.

JETER